



## If the land's sick, we're sick: The impact of prolonged drought on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal communities in rural New South Wales

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### Abstract:

To report Aboriginal communities' views of how prolonged drought in rural NSW has affected their social and emotional well-being, and of possible adaptive strategies. Design: Content analysis of issues, priorities and adaptive strategies raised in semistructured community forums. Setting: Rural centres across NSW. Participants: Aboriginal people, service providers and other stakeholders. Voluntary participation by invitation with consent to record discussions. Results: Three themes (containing six issues) emerged: (i) impacts on culture (harm to traditional family structure, culture and place; bringing shame to culture); (ii) sociodemographic and economic impacts (skewing of the population profile; loss of livelihood and participation; aggravation of existing socioeconomic disadvantage); and (iii) loss. In addition to continuing well-being programs that were already successful, proposed adaptive strategies were: capturing the spirit of Aboriginal knowledge and traditions; knowing your land; and Aboriginal arts. Conclusion: Prolonged drought presented substantial and unique adversity for rural NSW Aboriginal communities, compounding existing, underlying disadvantage. Drought-induced degradation of and, sometimes, the necessity to leave traditional land drove people apart and disrupted Caring for Country activities. Some people reported despair at not being able to discharge cultural obligations. At the same time, the drought prompted increased love of and concern for land and a renewed enthusiasm for expressing connectedness to land through all forms of art. Modern Aboriginal and wider community well-being programs helped frame a response to drought alongside traditional Aboriginal dreaming and cultural approaches to emotional health and well-being. © National Rural Health Alliance Inc.

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### Resource Description

#### Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

#### Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

# Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

**Other Communication Audience:** Aboriginal communities

**Exposure :** ☒

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

**Extreme Weather Event:** Drought

**Geographic Feature:** ☒

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Rural

**Geographic Location:** ☒

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

**Non-United States:** Australasia

**Health Impact:** ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Mental Health/Stress

**Mental Health Effect/Stress:** Stress Disorder

**Mitigation/Adaptation:** ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

**Population of Concern:** A focus of content

**Population of Concern:** ☒

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Low Socioeconomic Status, Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

**Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroup:** Aboriginal communities

**Resource Type:** ☒

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

**Resilience:** ☒

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

**Timescale:** ☒



time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

## **Vulnerability/Impact Assessment:**

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content